



David Clapper - Success Runs Deep

by Kaya Morgan

Michigan business tycoon, David Clapper, had no idea how life's twists and turns might earn him the golden ring. As founder, President and CEO of Atlantic Management Corp. in Farmington Hills, his company has completed forty major real estate investment projects since 1974 that brought Clapper's holdings to well over 10,000 apartments and nearly 1,000,000 sq. ft. of office, retail, and industrial space scattered across the Midwestern states. Not a bad reward for a once struggling, young door-to-door product salesman.

Early childhood had its up and downs for the Clapper family. Father, Ross, was a hard working salesman with Equitable Life Assurance Society while mother, Ruth, had her hands full managing the eight children while juggling to keep the household running smooth.

Summers were filled with outdoor activities built around keeping the children busy while living aboard the family's 40-foot motorboat. Life back then seemed much like a fairy tale until the slowing business economy forced Equitable's cutbacks to include laying David's father off. Soon, life took an abrupt about face, with the forced sale of the family home and losing their beloved boat. Cars were repossessed, possessions lost, and quickly, the family went from riches to rags.

Yet, tough times like these only brought the family closer together, and the Clappers soon learned that there was, in fact, strength in numbers. The teenage children took responsibility to help keep the family afloat while even the younger tots found their niche. Everyone worked together like a well oiled team, each doing their own small part.

By 12 years old, David Clapper knew what he wanted out of life. Even at that tender age, his imagination was intrigued while on an outing to a local ski resort with a close family friend. There, for the very first time, he saw the world from another perspective and realized that a successful, prosperous life garnered certain rewards. He knew then that being his own boss would most likely be the key to his future success, and the path he must follow to attain it.





With fate drawing him onward, while still in school, he worked full-time at a lawn mower company selling mowers and tractors until he eventually started his own landscape company. Following the principals learned at the Dale Carnegie course, he knew that life was a number's game, and if you knocked on enough doors, you would eventually reach your goal. So, from 21 years old, Clapper lived and breathed the "5-steps of selling" straight out of the Carnegie course. Working his way through college, he sold typewriters door-to-door until he reached the limit of products he could sell at any given time. He realized that he needed a much larger product that paid an even bigger commission. Taking stock of his options, he interviewed with several real estate companies

and accepted his first job in the industry working for the Hartman Group.

By 1985, a Hungarian business associate gave Clapper the opportunity to become involved in a real estate acquisition project based in Budapest. Long before the Berlin wall came down, Hungary had already earned the reputation of being the most capitalistic country in the European block. From the beginning, fortune smiled on Clapper with participation in such a sizeable transaction, played out on a monumental scale of 60+ hotels assembled in cooperation with the Hungarian government.

The project was one of the first of its kind, and the challenges were tremendous. However, at the last minute, the government had a change of heart and terminated the project even though it was nearly sold at the time. Yet, even this turn of events was not a total loss for Clapper. He had honed his negotiating skills, and earned the respect of some of the most powerful real estate moguls in the world. The group then joined together in a financial venture to purchase the second largest bank in Hungary. By now, Clapper's reputation for being a mogul in his own right was well underway.



Today, Atlantic Management contributes value in housing for first time renters, transients or those looking for a short term living situation. They have found extreme success by concentrating on "bread and butter" neighborhoods. "Although we may only be the Wal-Mart of the rental industry, we give a good, clean box because cleanliness costs very little. We may not have terrific amenities, but we do offer great value when it comes to your largest living expense," says Clapper. He believes that, "70% of the benefit can be derived from half the effort because the last dollar spent is so inefficient." Clapper firmly believes that a middle-of-the-road type of business like Atlantic Management has an advantage in the marketplace because of its ability to keep costs down while at the same time leaving room for giving the best value to its customers.



Beyond that, Clapper is even more proud of the fact that almost no one has ever quit the company even though the industry norm generates a very heavy turnover. Even more amazing, there has never been one investor complaint. No wonder — Clapper surrounds himself with loyal supporters including family, friends and even ex-family members who work in key positions within the company. But, make no mistake, the underlying cause is the character of the man at the helm.

His three children, David, Jr., Jonathan and Jennifer, all in their 30s remain close with David working in the industry and Jonathan honing the skills learned at his father's side. "One of my single most important achievements in life was developing patience with my children, friends and business associates — learning the language of letting them make their own choices. It takes an unbelievably unselfish behavior," says Clapper.

To a young entrepreneur, Clapper recommends, "Begin with a level playing field so that when things

start to heat up, fairness results. It's important to know what's in it for the other party. And, if you can realize that the large transactions are as easy to make happen as the lesser ones, you're ahead of the game. For example, when you first learn how to snow ski, you find it's easier to ski faster than slower. You just need to have the confidence, believe in your goal and act accordingly. Never be afraid to go a *little* faster — it's a lot easier to turn your skis," he says with a wink.

"Also," he goes on to say, "know that great things can come from bad decisions but they can only happen if you're 'in the game' or you simply can't prosper. In golf they call this 'never up, never in' — meaning that you have to get the ball *past* the hole if you ever want to get it *in* the hole. And, it may not matter if you've made bad decisions; bad ones can turn good.....good ones can turn bad. You have little control over the outcome sometimes but the most important business lesson you can learn is to be actively involved so that you can encourage positive results."

Clapper has strong ideas about how to maximize the best of life's experiences. He's found that balance is a key element of life. No matter what the momentum, he believes in taking a step back to make sure that even the smallest influences are not overlooked. "Exceptional people can be found anywhere and many times it's the common man that leads the way to the top," says Clapper.

Another important element is trust. "I am incredibly trusting even with the knowledge that I may get burned," he goes on to say. "I don't believe in prenuptial agreements. To arrange the details for the end of a relationship almost foretells an expected outcome." Even today, he still recalls discussions with his mother about "never missing the rewards of the few because the multitudes might take advantage of you."

In dealing with people, his long-time adage is, "Never complain, never complain, never complain. When someone does ill to you, never complain because it's just not worth the label you place on yourself."

Leisure hours have always included time spent on the water. With his primary home in Ft. Lauderdale, he enjoys the water almost daily. He loves to jump on his 38' Velocity, feel the wind on his face, get to where he's going *fast* (at 85 mph), then soak up the sun and take the time to smell the roses. When all else fails, he can head for his residence on The World, a luxury ocean liner, where he can live aboard the high seas, visiting ports around the globe.



One of his favorite acquisitions was a Burger, U.S. custom-built, 83 ft. aluminum boat with a 22 ft. beam making it comparable below deck to a 110 ft. boat. Normally, a boat that size would require a crew of three. Yet, even with crew, Clapper preferred to handle it himself and believes in doing the upkeep himself, as well. So committed is he to the boating lifestyle, he shipped a 54 ft. SeaRay to the Mediterranean so he could cruise that region of the world on his own vessel. Having earned his Master 100-ton commercial Mariner's license, Clapper has traveled most of the western Atlantic from Cape Cod to the Caribbean, single-handed. He is now working on his 500-ton license with an eye on Thailand, Vietnam and Australia as his next ports of call.



Fortunately, with enough free time on his hands, one-third of his time is devoted to charitable causes. Although he is active in a number of organizations, one-on-one is more his passion. People might be surprised to find out just how caring a person he really is. Clapper takes great pleasure in helping those close to him when they need it most. It's often said that you find out who your true friends are when the chips are down. Fortunately, for those close to him, Clapper is ever ready and willing to lend a helping hand. Even with his 24 nieces/nephews, he still personally oversees all their financing needs.

Clapper's Oakland Civic Charities Foundation was set up to consider the

needs of a variety of charities such as the *Dream Foundation*, *Special Olympics* and *Nothing But Nets*. He also sits on the finance committee of the Children's Educational Foundation, *Highscope*. Beyond that, he serves as a Trustee for the *Pope John Paul II Cultural Center* in Washington, D.C. whose mission is to address the meaning and purpose of life, justice, and peace in the world. Thanks to the commitment of loyal supporters, it has become as significant as any Presidential library.



As humble and genuine a man as you could ever meet — if wishes did come true, Clapper would want, "Everyone to be more appreciative of what they have in life. And, for people to stop trying to explain miracles in scientific terms because even through language, we really can't make sense of it."

For additional information on David Clapper; or, for publicity for yourself or your business, and other business development services, e-mail MediaLasVegas@aol.com or contact:

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